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BRITISH LEGISLATORS MEET TIMOR POLITICAL PRISONERS

JAKARTA, March 12, Reuter - British legislators visiting East Timor have met political prisoners who said they had been tortured by the Indonesian army but their conditions had since improved.

The seven-member British delegation met detainees in Camarca prison in Dili, the capital of the disputed territory, who had been named by the human rights group Amnesty International as having been tortured by the Indonesian military intelligence.

The prisoners said they had been beaten, burned and given electric shocks but the practice ended in 1987, Anne Clwyd, a member of the British team, said on Sunday.

''We were surprised by how ready (the Indonesian authorities) were to let us in to the prison,'' Clwyd said.

Most of the prisoners were accused of being members of the Fretilin guerrilla movement, a group opposed to Indonesia's 1976 takeover of the former Portuguese colony.

Although now reduced to between 500 and 1,000 guerrillas operating in the east of the island, Fretilin (Revolutionary Movement for an Independent East Timor) continues to evade Indonesian troops in the territory.

Clwyd said the British members of parliament had raised accusations of human rights abuses in talks with army officers.

''They all say no more torture,'' she said. ''And the political prisoners we met said they hadn't been touched since moving to Camarca in 1987.''

But she said East Timor Governor Mario Viegas Carrascalao admitted that he still heard of sporadic cases of brutality, although he did not detail the abuses involved.

''If it involves the military, I send a note in my own hand asking for action,'' Clwyd quoted the governor as saying.

The bishop of the fiercely Roman Catholic territory, Carlos de Belo, said in December that human rights abuses continued.

But the Indonesian authorities say the lifting of travel restrictions to and from East Timor in January, proved the situation there had improved dramatically.

The British lawmakers, who met President Suharto during their week-long visit, were due to leave for Thailand on Sunday.

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